

## REFORMULATING AND COMMUNICATING IGBO THEOLOGICAL CONCEPTS

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### ABSTRACT

*The Christian theology is founded upon Jewish theology, literature and customs expressed in the Hebrew Canon made up of The law, The writings and The prophets. Even Jesus Christ, founder of the Christian Faith, was a Hebrew rabbi from the tribe of Judah. Theologians have maintained, alongside many Igbo researchers, that Ndigbo are part of the lost ten tribes of Israel. This paper seeks to address the question of reformulating, some Christian theological concepts in Igbo, in the light of the above facts, as a sure way to re-connecting Ndigbo to the God of their Jewish origin. The paper discusses reformulation of text, communication and theological concept with sample texts and makes recommendations.*

**KEYWORDS:** Theology, Customs, Ndigbo, Reformulation & Christian Concepts

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### INTRODUCTION

The common use of English in expressing Christian theological texts to Igbo congregations has become a source of worry to scholars, especially translators and terminologists of Igbo stock. When concepts such as: law makers, heathenism, baptism, communion etc are reformulated from the view-point of: legislators, occultism (*Ndi-occult*); church concepts: baptism (*Iwu mmiri*), holy communion (*Oriri nso*) etc, instead of: *Amaala, Igo mmuo, ida-mmiri, Igba oriko* etc, it makes for ineffective communication as the understanding of the concepts and the doctrines in question are shallowly understood by the congregation, producing poor perlocutionary effect (poor Christian character). Theological text is a tool for theological communication and therefore must pursue effectiveness in speech-making, understanding of the speech made and acting out what is said whether as belief or as performance.

### THEORETICAL CONCEPT APPLIED

#### The Gilean Concept of Reformulation

In his two-step sequential model of translation, Gile (1995: 35) sees reformulation (re-expression), which is the second step of the model as translation proper, wherein the translator restitutes in the target language (TL), that which is comprehended in the source text. Comprehension itself, which embraces reading, is the first step in Daniel Gile's Two-step Translation Model. The reality of reformulation as restitution of text, which can either be written or oral gives it equal meaning as translation for written texts and interpreting for oral texts.

#### Theological Concept

A theological concept is an idea, a theme or a doctrine within the domain of theology. Theological concepts are didactic and function within the sphere of religion and morality. They include concepts such as baptism, Holy Communion, marriage, eternity, salvation and the thirty-eight (38) themes outlined in Lee (2011:vi).

Theology itself is defined in Fiorenza (1999: 178) as a discipline which has the task:

To engage in a critical delineation, reflection and evaluation of the rhetoric of God or on how scriptures, traditions and believers speak about their God.

This view gives Christians and Christian theologians the impetus to talk about African theology, European theology, American theology, Roman Catholic theology, Protestant theology, Anglican theology etc. Theology, it must be observed, has many branches such as liturgy, creedal theology, reformation theology, systematic theology, etc, but the chief and source of every Christian theology is biblical theology which itself is divided into the Old Testament theology and New Testament theology. Theological concepts therefore become ideas, themes and subject matters that centre on divine discourse.

### **The Igbo People (*Ndigbo*)**

In the words of Okeke (2015: 20)

Most people call the Igbo people the Jews of Africa by those same traits that characterise the Jews everywhere in the world: they are everywhere; they are very astute businessmen; they easily attract hate by their enterprise and finally because the very name of “Igbo” appears to be a corruption of the word “Hebrew”.

The Igbo People (*Ndigbo*) share more common traits with the Jews than mentioned above by Okeke: for example, the Igbo legislative system is similar to that of the Jews because both are elder-based (*Amaala* vs. Council of elders/heads of families). So also does the pattern of initiation into full citizenship (*Idammiri Okonko* vs. Water baptism), peace and conflict resolution (*Igba-Oriko* vs. Feast of Passover/Holy Communion). The giving of secondary position to women in the home and society, the burial of the entire body of the dead, not by cremation and a host of other cultural sameness attest to the commonness between *Ndigbo* and the Jews. Even the religious belief of *Ndigbo* in a sovereign God (*Chukwu*) who has his lieutenants such as: *ala*, *agwu*, *nnemiri*, *ahianjoku* who minister to him, is also found in the Jewish belief in a sovereign Yahweh who has angels who minister to him: Gabriel is in charge of errands, Michael caters for wars, Raphael sees to healing. Similarly, *Ala* is responsible for fertility, *agwu* takes care of wars and trouble, *ahianjoku* is in charge of Yam, the chief crop of *Ndigbo*. Both nations also operate a ministerial cadre in also the human realm.

One factor which Okeke mentioned above that captures our interest is the Diaspora: “They are everywhere”. Long before AD70, Jews had been a people of dispersion, thus there are Russian Jews, American Jews, Chinese Jews, African Jews which *Ndigbo* are believed to be part of. Apart from slave trade that affected the whole of Africa, entrepreneurial capabilities of the *Igbo* people is a major causative factor in the Igbo diaspora.

Geographically, the *Igbo* nation covers a geographical spread of the South-Eastern States of Nigeria namely: Abia, Anambra, Enugu, Ebonyi and Imo States in their entirety. Some parts of Delta, Edo and Rivers States are also part of the Igbo nation.

### **The Igbo Language**

Igbo is the native language of the Igbo people. Aremo (2009: 7) has this to say about the Igbo language:

For quite some time now, however, linguists working on the genetic classification of African languages have claimed that Igbo, Yoruba, Agatu, Bini etc. and many other West African languages (e.g. Ewe, Twi) are in fact members of the same subfamily, which they have called the Kwa subfamily of a Niger-Congo family of African

languages.

Uya (2005: 49) supports this claim in these words:

The Igbo, Edo, Yoruba, Nupe, Fon, Akan, Kuru and Kpele belong to the Kwa sub-group of the Niger-Congo with the Bantu providing the dominant group.

What the above two writers are trying to prove is not a case of intelligibility but of common features and a possibility of dominance as between the Hausa and its surrounding languages. *Igbo* like Hausa and Yoruba, is a major language in Nigeria.

### Communication

Olise (2009: 45) has this to say about effective communication:

Apparently, effective communication is the bedrock of peace and conflict resolution in every society. Meanwhile, it has been observed that effective communication can come in various forms like through oral media, history, dialogue, information and communication technologies (ICTs), media, drama, etc.

What Olise is trying to project here is that communication is not meant to be an ordinary and casual thing. It must be effective. When communication is ineffective, conflict is created between the communicator and his audience. Ineffective communication constitutes barrier in communication. This accounts for why Olise maintains that languages when distorted would cause a barrier in communication.

By effective communication in reformulating the Christian theological concepts in *Igbo*, following the Gilean concept of reformulation (re-expression/restitution) it involves all forms of translation: interlingual, i.e. from one language to another, intralingual (within the same language which is the reformulation of signs within the same language), and semiotics (the interpretation of symbols). The central role of translation is communication. According to Badia (2006: 2):

There is no doubt that translation has played an important role in ensuring communication and exchanges between numerous linguistic and ethnocultural groups on the African continent, as well as with the outside world. In fact, the practice of translation in the continent is as old as the act of communication itself, as translation has always been necessary for communication between various people and ethnicities on the continent.

In communication, ideas, thoughts, opinions, information are passed from sender to receiver and this must be done effectively. Effectiveness in the communicative role of translation is what Derrida (2004: 427) projects in his definition of translation:

...and translation is always an attempt at appropriation that aims to transport home, in its language, in the most appropriate way possible, in the most relevant way possible, the most proper meaning of the original text even if this is the proper meaning of a figure, metaphor, metonymy, catachresis or undecided impropriety.

Iwuagwu (2009: 75-85) reports that effective communication (appropriateness) assumed a major position in all Igbo Language Conferences held in over fifty years for the translation of *The Bible* and other Christian theological texts such as *Dr. James Wats Catechism*, Liturgy, Hymn Book etc into *Igbo*. Words such as *Qgwxwo/Qgwxla* (it is finished), *Qlx/Qrx* (Work or Labour), *Arx/Ahx* (body), etc were debated, to agree on appropriate meanings.

### Reformulation of some Igbo Theological Concepts in:

### *The Liturgy of Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion.*

#### Liturgical Titles

- Usoro nke Baptism di Nsq = Usoro idammiri nke ndi Kra[st
- Usoro nke Ijikq Di na Nwunye = Usoro qgbugba ndu nke Alxl Di na Nwunye.
- Usoro nke Oriri nsq ma q bu yukarist = Usoro igba Oriki nke ndi Kra[st.

(Above is a list of three liturgical titles with equality signs pointing to our reformulated titles)

Liturgical titles are headlines of books, book chapters and sub-chapters that are concerned with public worship such as: matins and evensong, wedding ceremony, baptism, eucharist (holy communion), burial of the dead etc. Akpan (2010: 69-70) discusses headlines as follows:

A headline is created to capture attention and provide information to help readers determine whether they wish to read the story. For some people, reading a news story depends entirely on the attractiveness of a headline. A headline is very important because that is where readers start. It is condensation of a story in a few words, it is a digest.

Every participant in a public worships, whether actively or passively, reading or auditing a pronounced discourse begins with the title or headline. The title is the psychological sign post that is inscribed in the worshipers mind. The concept, idea, or theme thus titled may be a sermon, a hymn or a liturgical text to be followed procedurally as an order. Therefore being conceived and written in English, the headline (title) ought to be reformulated in the most appropriate way that will achieve the aims of writing headlines as stated above: captivation, information, attraction and digestibility as a psychological sign post, should be the guide in reformulating liturgical tiles into *Igbo Language*.

Below is a table (table 1) of an original text and the version reformulated by us. The reformulated text primarily contains the concept of Baptism (baptism) and Eucharist (Yukarist), two calqued words re-expressed by us, using *Igbo* traditional concepts of *Ida mmiri* and *Igba oriko*.

**Table 1**

	ORIGINAL TEXT	REFORMULATED TEXT
	Title: Usoro Nke Baptism di nso (ntxzi aka)	Title: Usoro {da Mmiri nke ndi Kra[st (ntxzi aka)
1.	baptism bx xzq esi anabata mmadu n'ime nzukq Kra[st	{da mmiri nke ndi Kra[st bu xzq esi anabata mmadu n'ime nzukq Kra[st.
2.	N'oge q bxla a pxx ime ya, baptism kwesiri iwere qnqdx n'etiti emume ofufe nru Yukar[st n'xbochi Sqnde ma q bx n'xbqchi d[ nsq, na-esochi ngw nwa ofufe nru nke okwu Chineke. Onye isi emume Yukarist ga-abxkwa ony na edo ofufe nru baptism. Q ga ekpe ekpere n'elu mmiri, nabata nkwpuxta okwukwe nke ndi b[ara na baptism nakwa [kwqsa ha mmiri.	N'oge q bxla a puru ime ya [da mmiri nke ndi Kra[st kwesiri iwere qnqdx n'etiti emume ofufe nke {gba orikq nke ndi Kra[st n'Xbqch[ xka ma q bx n'xboch[ d[ nsq, na-esoch[ ofufe nru nke okwu Chineke, ngwa ngwa. Onye isi emume nke {gba oriko nke ndi Kar[st ga abxkwa onye na edo ofufe nru {da mmiri nke ndi Kar[st. O ga ekpe ekpere n'elu mmiri, nabata nkwpuxta okwukwe nke ndi b[ara na {da mmiri nke ndi Kra[st nakwa [kwqsa ha mmiri.

(The above table covers the concepts "Baptism" and "Eucharist". The original text is taken from: *The Church of Nigeria Anglican Communion. Usoro ime baptism din so (Litxi qhxx)*, 1996:1. NOTE: The new terms/expressions in our reformulated text are highlighted).

Table (2): The original text in the table below is drawn from: *Cathedral Parish nke St. Michael. Usoro ijikq Di na*

Nwunye. (1972: A). Both the original and reformulated texts are drawn from the liturgy for holy matrimony.

Table 2

ORIGINAL TEXT	REFORMULATED TEXT
Umu-nnam m hxr n'anya n'ezie, anyi gbakqrq n'otu n'ebea n'iru Chineke, na n'iru nzuko nkea, ijikq nwoke nkea na nway[ nkea n'[lx-di-na-nwunye d[ nsq. Nkea bx qnqdu di nsqpxrx nke Chineke kara na mgbe madu n'emehiegghi igos[ ay' njikq di omimi nke d[ n'etiti Kra[stn a nzuko ya.	Umu-nnam m hxr n'anya n'ezie, anyi gbakqrq n'otu n'ebea n'iru Chineke, na n'iru nzko nkea, ijikq nwoke nkea na nway[nkea <b>n'ogbxgba-ndu qlxlx-di-na nwunye d[ nsq</b> , nke bx qnqdx di nsqpxrx nke Chineke kara na mgbe madu n'emehiegghi igos[ ay[ <b>qgbxgba-ndu</b> d[ omimi nke d[ n'etiti Kra[stn a nzuko ya.

### Reasons for our Choice of New Words/Expressions

#### Ogbugba-ndu nke Alulu di na nwunye: In the Igbo Traditional Society

{da mmiri nke nd[ Kra[st. This is a name derived from the traditional initiation ceremony of the *Qkqnkq* society that symbolizes the maturity of a male person in the traditional Igbo society. A man who has passed through this rite of initiation is considered man enough to marry, go to war, be the king and to represent the community wheresoever. Just as in the Igbo traditional system, baptism connotes that the baptized person has believed in Christ and is disciple in the faith. Baptism becomes an observable index or mark of maturity in the faith and a seal of the same. A truly baptised Christian is supposed to be a defender of the Christian faith and is qualified to hold offices in the church and to train for priesthood. {da mm[r[ connotes immersion, whereas nke ndi Karist situates the action in the body of Christ which is the Church.

*Igba Oriq nke nd[ Kar[st* is used to reformulate *Yukarist*, a calqued word for Eucharist (Holy Communion). *Igba Oriq* in the traditional Igbo society is a covenant meal that binds members of a family: immediate or extended, community, age-grade, friends, etc., together. To be a covenant implies that it is unbreachable as its breach attracts negative supernatural consequences. In the process of dining and wining together, certain declarations as to the intent of the feasting are made by a man in a priestly position among the people, either the oldest male member of the family or the priest of a deity. It is forbidden for anyone from among the people thus covenanted to do evil against any member of the group. In the same way, the Holy Communion is the covenant meal of a people who share a common faith in one Saviour, Jesus Christ. The meal is celebrated by a priest in the faith with bread and wine which symbolize the body and blood of the Saviour, respectively. It is forbidden for a partaker in the Holy Meal to do evil or to plan evil against a fellow partaker, hence they all are members of one family: one Church, one Faith, one God.

*Qgbxgba-ndx nke Alxlx Di na Nwxnye*. In the Igbo traditional society, marriage is a covenant (*Qgbxgba-ndx*). Like every other process of covenanting which is marked by either consumption: food, wine, blood, kola as in *Igba oriq*, or physical exchange of materials such as animals, fowls, sticks, etc., the marriage covenant is solemnized by the priest tying the nuptial knots and the couple exchanging gifts, usually wedding rings, with each other. This is a covenant. It is unbreachable as its breach attracts grievous supernatural consequences.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

If the universal church all through the ages did not consider it unholy to use two words *Ekkalio* and *Ekklesia* from ancient heathen Greek cultures to explain "Church," the church in Igbo land should not also consider it unholy and absurd to use conventional words and expressions from *Igbo* cultures and tradition to express Christian theological concepts, in Igbo language, especially when these words express the concepts better. Such words/terms as mentioned above may be used as

direct equivalents. They may also be used interpretatively as similes. Christianity has come of age in *Igbo* land and as such, terms in calque can no longer be tolerated in expressing our theology. We must use our mother tongue.

## CONCLUSIONS

This paper has tried to reveal the linguistic and cultural commonness between *Ndigbo* and the Jews which breed the conviction to many *Igbo* researchers that the *Igbo* people are part of the lost ten tribes of Israel. The paper therefore, calls for the exploitation of these common resources in the oral, written, interlingual, intralingual and semiotic reformulations of the Christian theological text into *Igbo*, where they exist. Where they do not exist, creation of terms, out-right borrowing or calque should be adopted to cover gaps. These would make for effective communication where the locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary effects of speech acts would be adequate in theological setting within the *Igbo* nation.

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